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AN

INVESTIGATION

OF THE

POLICY OF MINISTERS.

Αἰεὶ δ', ἀμφ' ἀρεταῖσι, πόνος δαπά-
να τε μάχεται πρὸς
Ἔργον κινδύνῳ κεκαλυμμένον.

Εὖ δὲ ἔχοντες, σοφοὶ καὶ πολί-
ταις ἔδοξαν ἔμμεν.

PIND.

Nor is any man more an enemy to public peace than he who
with weak heels with imaginary claims, and breaks the series
of civil subordination by inciting the lower classes of mankind
to assault upon the higher.

JOHNSON.

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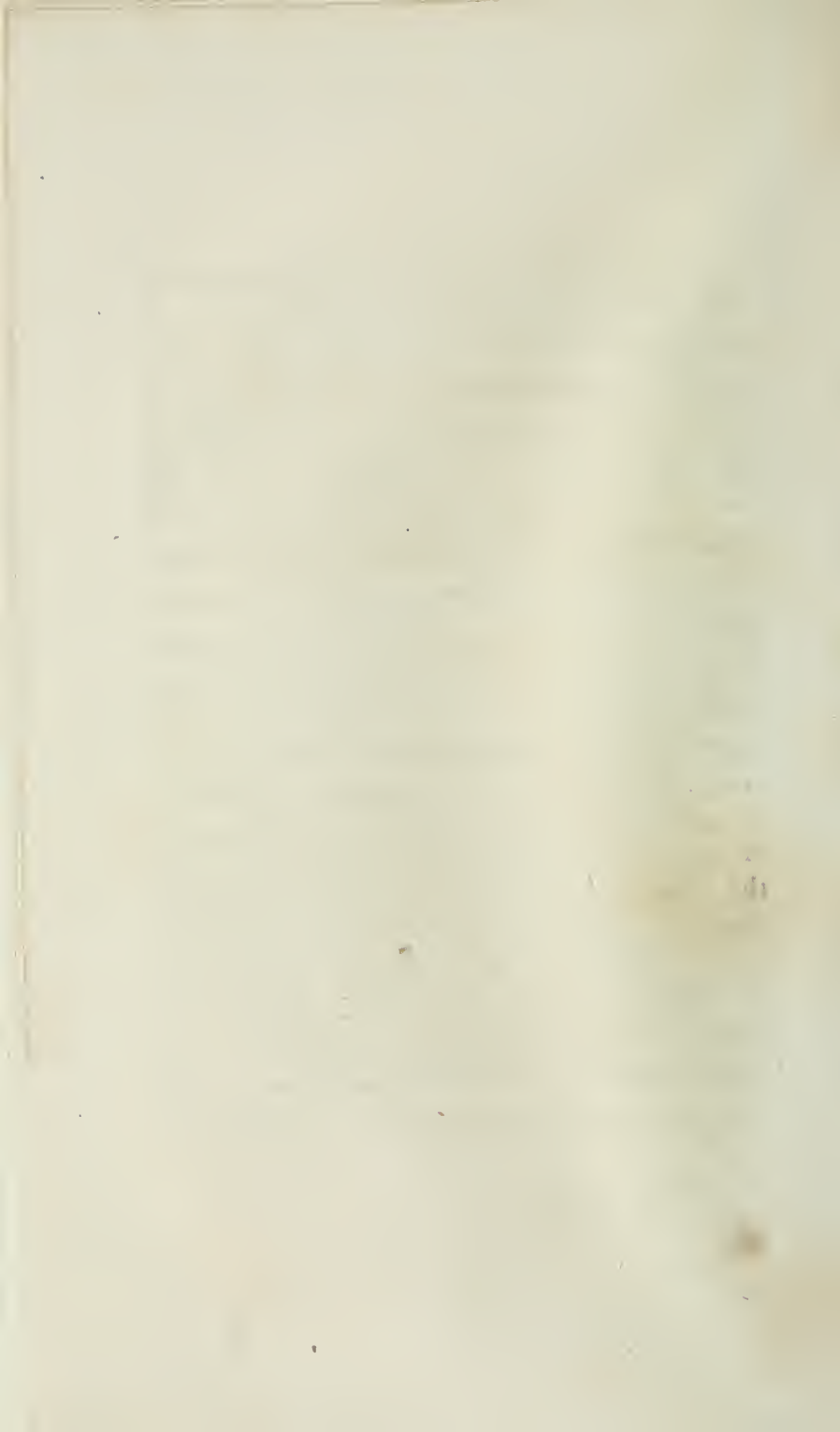
1818.

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THE following pages are addressed to the Independent Electors of England, as treating of those subjects by which they will be the most strongly influenced in the choice of their representatives at the ensuing general election. The greater part of the work was written before the close of the year 1817, but the publication of it was delayed by circumstances, in which the author only is interested. After the subsequent interval of near four months, it would have remained for ever a mere closet memento of past dangers ; but questions, almost forgotten, in the satisfied indifference of present security, having been revived and misrepresented, it is perhaps not unnecessary to present to the elective body of the people, a view, however imperfect, of the conduct pursued by those, who must shortly call upon them for a renewal of the highest trust, with which, as British Commoners, they can be invested by their fellow countrymen.

May, 1818.



AN
INVESTIGATION
OF THE
POLICY OF MINISTERS.

A VARIETY of opinions have been entertained on the proceedings of Parliament in the Session of 1817. If the people were disposed to judge of its merits by comparing the present state of the country with its awful situation when that Session commenced, the contrast would be gratifying, and not a little curious. Since that time many terrific predictions have been falsified, and many apprehensions have proved groundless. Evils, then thought irremediable, have since wholly disappeared ; while dangers, which were by many ridiculed as imaginary, having brought the kingdom to the verge of revolution, are now overcome by means which, by those who denied their necessity, have been

reprobated in proportion as they have proved successful. A short retrospect of things past may help to decide whether a Parliament which is now making its last appearance in the drama of our history, shall be followed on its final exit with censure or applause.

The most sanguinary and extended war that ever desolated Europe, or called forth the genius and resources of England, had terminated in a succession of conquests more glorious and decisive than all that ever graced the page of history. A general peace had followed, in which the interests of Great Britain were upheld, and the high object of her efforts in the conflict was attained. But glory had been dearly purchased. The lives of heroes, and the fortunes of patriots, had been unsparingly lavished in the struggle; the enthusiastic joy which had been felt at our unexampled successes, was followed by the miseries of poverty and the murmurings of discontent. A deep and unusual distress pervaded all classes of society. The Landholder and the Merchant, the Manufacturer and the Labourer, complained alike of an alarming failure of all former resources. So rapidly did these embarrassments and sufferings follow the late general exultation, that in the minds of many they became insensibly identified, and seemed to have been produced by the same cause. Our triumphs and advantages were forgotten; and those by

whose counsels we had been guided to the pinnacle of glory, were reviled as the authors of our calamities. It was no longer their fortune to receive the deserved tribute of gratitude and applause ; it was enough if they could withstand the attacks of ignorance and envy. It is not for the independent vindicator of British counsels to deny or under-rate the heavy evils by which their great results were accompanied. The unmerited sufferings of vast numbers of the people were indeed severe. Many who had borne with generous firmness the burthens imposed on them by the long and wasting conflict in which we had been engaged ; who had seen their dearest relatives fall around them in the defence of their country, and had sacrificed the comforts and enjoyments of their families to supply her pressing exigencies, but who had fondly looked to the return of peace as the harbinger of happier times, now found themselves reduced to the extremity of distress, and apparently by the event from which they had anticipated relief. The soldier who had fought for our glory, the sailor who had bled in our defence, came, decked with laurels of victory, to a home of want and sorrow. All descriptions of persons were visited by their share of the general calamity ; there was little scope for exertion, and patience seemed stretched to the utmost.

These distresses were produced by various

causes. By a multifarious concurrence of circumstances during the war, our commercial system had become so extensively ramified and expanded, that an ample vent was found for the whole produce of the land and labour of the country. While the manufactories, notwithstanding the introduction of machinery, afforded employment to the greater portion of productive labourers throughout the kingdom, the war gave rise to a variety of offices and occupations by which that numerous class of persons, termed the unproductive labourers of the community, were supported, and, in the disposal of their incomes, at once contributed to the maintenance of others and to the general advancement of national commerce. The prosperity of the manufacturer gave a proportionate increase of revenue to the landholder, and such was the concord in which the whole system operated, that even the heavy taxation necessary to support the expences of the war, seemed but a burthen against which new resources were provided as its pressure increased. Things continued in this state until it seemed the regular and unchanging course of affairs. No apprehensions were entertained, for no ideas were formed of the future; and it was hoped that at the conclusion of the war all difficulties would be removed and all advantages would continue. At length the day of peace arrived, and a sudden

change of all things followed. Many evils which had been gradually generated, and finally matured by causes slow but certain in their operation, and originally unconnected with the war, now became palpable amid the general mass of misfortune, and seemed embodied with it. Difficulties, temporary in their nature, and arising also separately and accidentally, were at once combined with the rest, and the whole tremendous complication of national calamity was said to have been created solely by the late war. The consequences that ensued were natural. Disappointment, misery, and discontent spread throughout the country. All ranks of people felt the evil; but the sufferings of the inferior classes were indescribable. Of the great body of labourers, the sinews of a nation's strength, and whose condition is the criterion of a nation's prosperity, immense numbers were deprived of employment, and became charges on the public, to whose well-being they had hitherto so effectually contributed by their industry. Their masters, the manufacturers, with large quantities of unsaleable commodities, with an injured trade and impaired resources, were compelled to subsist upon their capital. All the rich landholders, the value of whose property necessarily depends on the prosperity of the other branches of the state, found their revenues considerably diminished; and by their consequent retrench-

ment of expenditure, lessened the returns of the retail traders, and through them, of merchants and manufacturers. To heighten these difficulties, great numbers who had been employed in civil and military capacities by Government, being wholly unprovided for, or remunerated with allowances inadequate to their maintenance, were thrown back to feed on the resources of the country.

The commercial disorder thus created, was the first and greatest evil. The wasting effects of the poor-laws, which increasing with the growth of more than two centuries, had at length extended their devastations into the heart of the country's prosperity, now added their intolerable weight to the general pressure. Our misfortune was of that deep-rooted and universal nature that is neither immediately felt nor easily understood. Surpassing in extent and severity all that had been experienced at the conclusion of former wars, the remedial measures adopted at those periods afforded no precedent to guide the Statesmen of the present day. The time which was then found sufficient to raise the nation to its ordinary level of prosperity had already elapsed, and our difficulties, far from disappearing, seemed only to assume a form of more permanent magnitude. It was now no season for inactivity or indifference. The symptoms of general disease grew alarming, and

the country called for the interposition of the legislature. The call was promptly answered, and measures were speedily adopted, which, assisted by the natural operation of British skill, industry, and enterprize, soon changed the gloomy aspect of affairs. Commerce revived in all its branches; public and private credit was strengthened; individual distress was relieved by voluntary beneficence; and an abundant harvest completed the renovation of the kingdom's vigour and prosperity.

But past sufferings were not wholly forgotten; and the accountability for them still remains a question among parties. It is admitted that the late distresses were somewhat heightened, and in part produced, by the great taxation necessary to support the war: the responsibility for this portion of them, therefore, undoubtedly rests on those by whose policy the war was carried on. It has, indeed, by a singular method of reasoning, been contended, that as the embarrassments were felt upon the transition from war to peace—"they are chargeable as matter of blame upon those by whom the war was conducted." * But it is useless to controvert this position, which would tend to show that had the war lasted for ever, the distress would never have arrived, and Ministers had been blameless.

* Mr. Brougham's Speech on the state of the Nation.

The true question to determine is, the original expediency of the war, and the policy of its subsequent continuance. These two points are therefore now to be examined.

The time is not yet come when we can look back "with the cold neutrality of abstract justice," upon the conflicting opinions which divided the political world at the commencement of the revolutionary war in 1793. But *δοξ πρ σω*; there are recorded facts on which the judgment may rest with security, and behold the objects in the scope of argument by the pure light of reason. From the strongly-marked complexion of passing events, there never was a time when the passions of mankind became more deeply involved in a contest; yet never was the aid of passion less necessary to amplify the cause, or colour the justification of hostility. The rights of Princes; the character, the security, and the happiness of nations, were invaded; the high dignity of the British people was insulted, and their existence threatened by a strange political body of such a nature and composition as had never yet sprung from the womb of time. A number of individuals, convoked by the King of France, our Ally, for the purpose of settling the internal affairs of his own kingdom, having destroyed the authority by which they were constituted, assumed political independence and supremacy. Through all the changes which

this body underwent, it was still the same with respect to the British and all foreign governments. By a series of usurpations, which, with the means used to effect them, formed certainly no part of our concerns, they acquired a power superior to any other then existing in France. They murdered their King, with whom we were connected by various treaties, and whom alone we knew as the representative of the French people; and they then present themselves to us as the lawful government of France. We naturally inquire their claims to that title, and we find, that the whole frame and constitution of society in a country being broken and dissolved, and men being returned to their original state of individuality and independence, a certain number of them have united themselves in a body, to which they have given a name borrowed from institutions now no more, and of which all that concerns us is, that it possesses a degree of physical strength which it may use to our molestation. Such was the heterogeneous power, a strange political monster, by which Europe was threatened, and whose progress England was called to oppose.

It has ever been deemed a sacred duty among powerful nations to guarantee, in general treaties, the rights and independence of such among their Allies, as by their contiguity to great and ambitious states, might be open to invasion, and

unprovided with the means of defence. To the maintenance of this equitable principle, that public good faith which can alone bind communities together, has been peculiarly directed; and the honour of a nation is considered to be engaged when the rights of an Ally protected by its guaranty are attacked. But a body of men in the centre of Europe, after seizing, with the arms of anarchy and treason, the sovereign power of their own Government, attempted to subvert, by their single voice, the established public law of the world. To those who, with the sword of rebellion, had cut asunder all the ties by which the various orders of their own society had for centuries been connected, the ancient bond of union which cemented nations, could be no restraint. In an early period of their iniquity, before their power was supported by the plunder, or compacted by the blood, of their superiors, they had thought it prudent to renounce for ever all views of conquest, and confine themselves strictly to defensive war. But mark the sincerity of Jacobins and Atheists! No sooner were they secure of support from the soldiers whom they had corrupted, than their foreign aggressions began. Their first act of hostility against other powers, was the violation of the feudal rights possessed in Alsace and Lorraine by several princes of the empire, and guaranteed to them by successive treaties. This

unprecedented infringement of public compact was one of the causes that afterwards led to a war with the whole Germanic body. Next Avignon and the Venaissin, infected with their detestable principles, betrayed by their intrigues, and plundered by their rapacity, were seized in criminal scorn of justice, and incorporated with France. This was a direct attack, aimed at once at the Papal Government, the empire, and Sardinia. The neutral territory of the Bishop of Basil, another member of the empire, was also invaded and occupied by a French force, in contravention of a special treaty previously inviolate. A declaration of war against Austria was the next indication of their ambitious designs, and was soon followed by the successful invasion of the Austrian Netherlands.

In these acts of flagrant injustice, though our interests were hurt, our influence abroad undermined, and our Allies insulted and injured, we sustained no direct wrong which called for redress by war. But the irresistible progress of the French armies in the Netherlands prompted the masters of France, in the hour of their exultation, to commit so daring an infraction of the independence of a neutral power guaranteed and protected by Great Britain, that the continuance of peace between the two nations became impossible. In December, 1792, by a decree of the Convention, the navigation of the

river Scheldt was declared free, and on the same day the commander of the French armies was directed to pursue the enemies of the Republic into all countries. The exclusive command of this river had, upon every principle of equity and expediency, been assigned to the Dutch by the Emperor, as sovereign of Austrian Brabant, in a treaty considered as one of the main pillars of the balance of Europe, and the Charter of Dutch freedom ; a treaty often renewed, and as solemnly sanctioned and guaranteed by France, who broke it, as by England, who was now bound to preserve it inviolate, and to shield her Ally from approaching ruin. That this most astonishing outrage would at any period during the last century have roused the indignation of Britain, and brought down her vengeance on its perpetrators, cannot be questioned by any one who considers our history since the accession of William the III. nor was it doubted by those who made the bold experiment ; their agent in this country, the individual whom in better days their captive Monarch had appointed his Ambassador, insolently justified the wrong by founding it on the rights of man, claimed by the French on behalf of their new friends by fraternity, the Belgians.

But long before this transaction, which, as Great Britain could not recede from the most solemn treaties, was the immediate signal for

war, a pre-disposition to enmity had been on all occasions manifested by the prevailing factions in France. In their unprovoked aggression upon the Emperor, they marked their determination, since so fatally proved, to wage eternal war against all crowned heads. England, which had hitherto observed a scrupulous neutrality, perhaps too little affected by events which in other times would have spread an alarm from one end of the kingdom to the other,—England was now crowded into the mass of nations obnoxious to democratic insolence and tyranny. The ambitious views of the Assembly were no longer veiled by artifice or hypocrisy. It was openly anticipated that when the phantom of the empire should be dispelled, Brabant would be free and the Ally of France; that Holland, emancipated from the tyranny of the Stadtholder, would co-operate in the cause of Republican freedom, and that the *Government* of England could but strike at a distance, while the *People* of England would offer up prayers for the liberation of France, which they knew would one day extend to themselves. Even the fantastic mummeries of a group of ragged hirelings* received the solemn sanction of the Assembly, rather than its approbation should be withheld from the invectives of a madman

* Deputation of Anacharsis Clootz.

against the maritime ambition of England. The spirit of enmity which thus betrayed itself was perpetually nourished by the violent and rancorous effusions of democratic orators, and often vented itself in false and insolent allusions, which proved the existence of a suppressed fire within, that only required the aid of force and opportunity to burst out in the fiercest flames of open war. It was not long before the last ties of restraint were broken by the savage butchery of the guiltless, ill-fated Louis, which left the Assembly of regicides at liberty to pursue, unchecked, their atrocious designs on foreign nations, and principally on England. During the life of their degraded Sovereign, they had not scrupled to pass the decree unparalleled in the annals of the world, by which they offered fraternity and assistance to all people contending with their Rulers for freedom. They engaged to treat as enemies all who should refuse their proffered liberty and equality, and attempting to stir up the people in this country, as in others, to revolt against their lawful Governors, held out promises and allurements to the disaffected, and threatened the Government with destruction.

These were not the transient corruscations of popular fervour, but the radical determinations, deliberately expressed, of a body of men who, from the moment that they became possessed

of a power built on the ruins of justice, had made their lightest threatening word a sure and fatal prelude to terrible execution. To their own ill-fated King and country, or to people venturing to accept their aid in the vain pursuit of an imaginary liberty, their promises were shamefully broken as their interest required the sacrifice of their honour or good faith. But to Princes and Governments, to the possessors of property, of peace, of security, of power, or of independence, never were their denunciations of enmity and destruction allowed to sleep in oblivion—they were enforced to the last lawless stretch of murderous hatred. Their vows of friendship were never kept, but their pledges of vengeance were always grievously redeemed. Once the object of their jealous yor rapacity, once pointed out as their enemy, and no state, however peaceably disposed, had a chance of safety but in its own strength: England was both, was all. By the undissembled and unanimous declaration of the destroyers, she was in policy, in power, in principle, their foe. She had therefore nothing to hope from their moderation or justice, and had all to fear from their deadly and inveterate hostility, from their remorseless and unbounded ambition.

Surely, if the arguments for the necessity of a war stopt here, it is impossible to reflect on the occasions which had ever been sufficient to

set the whole kingdom in a flame of hostility, and not wonder how a single voice could be raised against an attempt to punish such repeated and unexampled aggressions. But the successful irruption of France into surrounding territories furnished another motive to the interposition of England. On the accession of William the Third it became evident to the Statesmen who called him to the throne, that the interests of the nation required the maintenance of a balance of power in Europe, which the ambition of Lewis the Fourteenth then threatened with destruction. This country had every thing to dread from the preponderance of such a rival, and from this time may be dated its influence and constant interference in the affairs of the Continent. At an auspicious juncture, the scale of European power was seized by the enterprising hand of William the Third, and no longer biassed by the predominant strength or influence of any single nation, was in future to be poised by the impartiality, and upheld by the force of Britain. An unalterable principle was here established, on which the system of our external policy was to rest for ever. That its wisdom has sometimes been doubted by enlightened statesmen is a consideration which sinks to nothing before the unchanging and unanimous opinions of the illustrious succession of Cabinets by which our counsels have been

guided through a century of glory and prosperity. Indeed, the contravention of this maxim has rather been an occasional theme of opposition in parliament, than the deliberate practice of sound politicians; as many, who have theoretically condemned the interference of England in foreign politics, have discovered and avowed the error of their opinions on obtaining a share in the government. France, our ancient rival and modern competitor, possessing transcendent power, but still intent on views of aggrandizement, has been the common invader of other nations, and has most frequently called forth the restraining arm of England. Against France we maintained the balance of power throughout a desperate contest, which continued with little intermission from 1689 to 1713; and at Utrecht, faithful to professed principles which required the preservation of her integrity, granted her against the earnest representations of our own Allies, a peace on terms she scarcely dared hope for. To support the house of Austria, the true European counterpoise to France, we preserved the balance inviolate at Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748. Still, regardless of particular interests, but bent on the general object, we defended Prussia, during the seven years' war, against the united arms of Austria and the house of Bourbon; and once again, at the peace of 1763, preserved the European balance unbroken, even at

the sacrifice of our own dearly-earned advantages in Asia, Africa, and America. From this period the federal union of European states, which it was the policy of England to hold entire, underwent no change, affecting the established balance, till the French revolution, annihilating one of its first members, erected in its place a Power that disavowed the public law by which its predecessor, in common with all other nations, had been bound. The political equilibrium, with the right of governments to uphold it, as recognised by a long line of treaties, commencing with that of Westphalia, were considered by the French revolutionists as a phantom of prejudice which the light of their new-born philosophy was to dissipate. The laws of nature, as interpreted by themselves, were in future to regulate France, which now, for the first time, was said to extend from the Alps to the Ocean, from the Rhine to the Pyrennees ; the only true boundaries which nature had assigned, and which France would recognise. The rights and securities of other states were disregarded, and all notions, however founded on justice and experience, which militated against their views, they determined to counteract by sophistry, or combat by open force. Their doctrines of aggrandisement were publicly avowed at the early period of the declaration of war against the empire, and hostilities commenced

by an attack on that rich and populous portion of the Netherlands which had long been the first object of their rapacity. The disunited and impolitic proceedings of their opponents, added to the sanguinary and desperate spirit which animated their own armies, soon favoured their ambitious attempts, and led to those successive acquisitions of territory with which they assumed, at the close of the year 1792, so formidable a posture of augmented power. At that time the face of Europe presented an awful spectacle to Great Britain. France, disclaiming the validity of all political and social obligations, had waged successful war against the foremost powers of the Continent. Her natural strength, always commanding and terrible, had been immensely increased. Besides the Papal dominions of Avignon and the Venaissin, the Sardinian territories, the Duchy of Savoy, and the province of Nice, were added to her conquests; and the principal barrier which protected Italy was broken down. Switzerland was menaced, and almost within the grasp of her ambition. The states which separated her from the Rhine, the strong rampart of the empire, were in her power. The fertile and populous country of the Austrian Netherlands, which had been preserved at the cost of so many long and bloody contests; the link of communication between England and Germany, the bulwark of Holland, was van-

quished and lying at her mercy. Holland itself was in danger. The armies of the empire of Prussia and of Sardinia were flying before an irresistible enemy, who had, in one short Campaign, acquired more advantages than had in other times been purchased by the victories of the longest and most successful wars. Those three powers, never before combined against France, were incapable, when united, of contending with her. Their destruction was at hand ; and that triumph gained, Europe would be in subjection to the conqueror.

And was this a time for England to view the awful events that were convulsing the world with an eye of passive neutrality ? those who answer that it was, must prove that the first principles of her long-tried, long-prosperous policy are fallacious ; that the independence and existence of ancient and faithful allies were not the worthy objects of her care ; and that her interests would be unhurt if France were undivided mistress of Europe. Louis the fourteenth, in the plenitude of his greatness, when his enmity to this Country was most inveterate, never had half the ills in store for it that were now impending, ready to fall and crush the fabric of its glory and happiness, whenever the Jacobins of France should turn triumphant from the ruin of Europe to achieve the overthrow of England.

But, as if the gathering dangers which lowered at a distance were not enough to rouse the slumbering spirit of the nation, an evil, unfelt before, had sprung up in the midst of us, which shook the corner-stone of our safety and peace. The destructive principles, disseminated with fatal activity by the leaders of the French revolution through all countries within the reach of their influence, had been adopted with enthusiasm by a numerous party in Great Britain. The liberty of speech and action, secured to the subject for the wisest purposes by our constitution, became a dangerous weapon for designing men to use against the power that gave it. Societies were formed in all the principal cities of the empire, at whose meetings those doctrines which were undermining the peace and order of the civilized world were avowed and defended. Under the pretence of seeking a reform in the government, measures were practised, and notions inculcated, which tended to the subversion of all government. These societies were in constant communication with each other, and with the National Assembly. They had sent delegates to Paris, who were received with more distinction than the king's ambassador, whose advice was followed by them in state proceedings, and who were sent back, charged with the good wishes and vows of the Jacobins for the prosperity of their

friends and brothers in England. The fatal example, given by the destroyers of France, was followed to the extent of their means, though happily with less success, by their imitators in this country. The same system for the general diffusion of principles was established ; the corresponding society in London was formed like the Jacobin club in Paris. The press was made to pour forth publications of every description, appealing to the respective passions, prejudices, and interests, of all classes of men. In a volume of monstrous documents, published by the revolutionary society, the example of France was declared worthy of imitation ; the duty of insurrection was held to be sacred ; the highest orders of the state were calumniated, and a league was made, in the name of the nation, with the Jacobins of France, for extending the empire of liberty and truth over the whole world. It thus became evident, in the course of the year 1792, that their aim was to divide the people from the government, or to form a party in the kingdom, which, with the promised aid of their French brethren, would be able to effect, like them, the subversion of the established Constitution, and to erect on its ruins a system of their own. The experiment was not confined to this country : it extended to all on which France had views of conquest ; and wherever the supreme power of the state was in weak or

irresolute hands, its operation was fatal. Even here the time was critical. The faction had diffused a report, that some great political catastrophe was at hand ; and men's minds being thus prepared, if either a strong body of the population could have been brought to join their party, or if their allies in treason could have spared, from Continental pursuits, a force sufficient for their revolutionary purposes, it is not to be doubted, that the forcible overthrow of the Government would have been attempted. The measures of Ministers had given a check to their progress ; but while their ardor was nourished by perpetual intercourse with the Jacobins of France, while they had a firm reliance on the ultimate efficiency of the immense and increasing power of that Body, no internal policy could be permanently effectual in combating their designs. Thus, while numberless and appalling dangers to the country were collecting without, safety, order, and law, were threatened within : and at this juncture, the convention of France, in conformity to its established practice with foreign states, declared war against the *King* of Great Britain, calling on his *People* to rise against him.

It was now apparent that to persevere in the pacific policy hitherto pursued, if it could for a moment have been supposed practicable, was to bring on this nation, for the first time, from our

oldest and best Allies, the merited charges of treachery, cowardice, and the violation of solemn treaties. It was to behold with passive indifference the indefinite aggrandizement of a people whose empire would be founded on the ruins of other Governments ; whose avowed principles aimed at the destruction of morality, religion, and social order ; and who were animated by so implacable a hatred of our Government and institutions, that they waited but for sufficient power, already promised to them by the successes of their arms, to introduce among us their own odious mixture of anarchy, vice, violence, and republicanism. They had already advanced so far in its acquisition, that the conflict must be long and terrible which could stop their destructive course. A very short delay would enable them to reach a station of influence and strength from which they might defy opposition. What would then be the situation of Europe and of England ? The balance of power, purchased with the best blood and treasure of many countries, in many generations, would be irredeemably lost, and Europe in impotent subjection to a band of military robbers. England, convulsed by a faction within ; her foreign influence destroyed ; her very name despised ; would lie at the mercy of the French Republic. The war, however, found opposers among men of high rank and immense property ; possessing

transcendent talents, and what is still more wonderful, of untainted loyalty and attachment to the constitution. It is not surprising that, on such a question, the minority in Parliament was deserted by some of its most distinguished members; but it is difficult to account for the dereliction of their former principles, by the party which continued adverse to the belligerent policy of the Government, unless it be ascribed to that habitual opposition to the measures of Ministers, which no public emergency can ever turn to concord. It was an inconsistency never to be reconciled, that the men who, in 1787, had declared that to support the party in Holland favorable to British interests, against the adverse influence of a French faction, was a just occasion for war,* should, in 1793, contend that Great Britain could remain at peace, while Holland, already invaded and half revolutionized, was threatened by the French Republic with total subjection.

It was urged that our influence, if exercised in a sincere and amicable negotiation, might obtain justice for our Allies, and satisfaction and security for ourselves. It was even said that, by this means, the life of the unfortunate Louis might have been preserved, and some

* See speeches of Mr. Fox and other eminent orators on the same side, in the Parliamentary debates for 1787.

degree of order and concord restored among his subjects. But that great end was beyond the reach of man. If the persons then directing the Government of France had not disowned the obligation of all compacts between nations ; if a treaty could have defended us from their swords, it would but have turned them on their already bleeding countrymen ; and no treaty would have been a barrier against the mortal pestilence of their principles. There were no reciprocal views or wishes ; no acknowledged precedent in past times ; no mutual guarantees or pledges which could form the basis of a treaty : or if there had been all these, it was vain to suppose that men who had broken the strongest moral and political ties by which human creatures can be bound, who were daily violating the laws which they themselves had made, would yield to the dictates, or be swayed by the representations of a Government which they at once envied, hated, and feared.*

The illustrious Statesman who was chosen by a gracious Sovereign, and a more gracious Providence, to guide his country through the imminent perils that encircled it, has been

* In illustration, see the correspondence between Prince Kaunitz and the French Minister on the war with Austria, and the letters of Lord Grenville and Monsieur Chauvelin on the opening of the Scheldt.

accused of seeking to gratify a vain ambition, by a display of those talents in war which had already been so eminently shewn in multiplying and improving the blessings of peace. But it was equally contrary to his great financial designs,* and to his opinions on the commercial interests of the country,† that we should again become the antagonist of France. His sentiments in favor of peace and neutrality continued unchanged through all the early distractions and divisions of the French revolution;‡ and his inactivity was loudly censured throughout Europe, and by a numerous party in England, for many months before the declaration of war. At length the opening of the Scheldt, and the hostile decree of the Convention, roused the people and inflamed the Minister; then, “when his great mind was up to the crisis he was called

* Twenty years of peace was the period requisite for the maturity of the comprehensive plans on which Mr. Pitt had bestowed so much anxiety and labour.

† See debates on the Commercial Treaty of 1787.

‡ L'Empereur me fit entrer dans son cabinet et me dit qu'il n'avoit pas pu me parler plutôt de l'objet pour lequel il m'avoit fait venir puisqu'il attendoit des reponses de Russie, d'Espagne, d'Angleterre, et des princepeaux Souverains de l'Italie; qu'il les avoit reçues; qu'elles estoient conformes à ses intentions et ses projets; qu'il étoit assuré de leur assistance dans l'exécution et de leur réunion à l'exception cependant du cabinet de St. James, qui avoit déclaré vouloir garder la neutralité la plus scrupuleuse.
—*Memoires du Marquis De Bouillé.*

to act in," he gave the counsels of his country an impulsive spirit, which never ceased to animate them till they had overthrown the enemy of Britain and of the world.

If the great events which involved this country in the general contest have been diffusely treated, it is because they are unequalled in importance by all the convulsions and revolutions that ever alarmed the world; because their effects have especially visited Great Britain, and are felt to this day in their influence upon every question which becomes a subject for political discussion. The distress which we have lately suffered, the perils to liberty which have lately been averted by great though temporary sacrifices, the dangers which still hover over the Constitution, are all connected in their origin with the causes of the war; and they form a melancholy exemplification of its effects. *Hæc ego mecum compressis agito labris.* The retrospect is therefore not useless. It shews that of the evils left to our choice, we avoided the fatal and the irremediable, and encountered those which were surmountable by human power. It proves to the English people, that it was to avenge the injuries which they had received; to preserve inviolate the faith which they had pledged; to maintain the advantages and the fame which they had, at much cost and by mighty struggles, obtained; to avert the heavy

and awful calamities with which they were threatened ; and to repulse the implacable enemy by which they were attacked, that their Government waged war against the destroyers of Government in France.

From the inauspicious commencement of the conflict, to its glorious termination in 1815, although its character underwent many changes, which produced correspondent alterations in the views with which this country bore so eventful a part in it, the fundamental motive to constant war ; the impossibility of obtaining peace with honor and security continued undiminished. The first four years after hostilities began were rendered dreadful to England by the sanguinary hatred which animated her enemies in their attacks. It was a murderous spirit, which forbade the approach of peace or conciliation, and guarded the Temple of Jacobinism, while its ferocious votaries went forth in multitudes to spread desolation over Europe. The negotiations which took place between the two countries were hopeless of success on the part of England, and insincere in the Government of France. While the indivisibility of the French Republic, enlarged as it was by territorial acquisitions, was to be the first basis of a treaty, it was impossible for England to begin a conference without sacrificing the main principle on which the war was undertaken. While France insisted

on treating with England separately, and without regard to her Allies, the negotiation could not but be founded on a disgraceful violation of good faith. While the individuals possessing the Supreme power in France, displayed in public speeches and official writings their inveterate and exclusive enmity to this country, and strove to communicate their hostile sentiments to the French nation, and to all Europe, it was evident that their attempts to negotiate were insincere, and made only to throw the whole odium and culpability of the war upon the British Ministry.

But if England could have procured an exclusive peace, so advantageous to herself as to leave nothing more to desire, France would still have disdained to be influenced in her conduct to other powers. Austria, her constant and heroic antagonist, the pillar of the European confederacy, was soon humbled to the dust. The treaty of Campo Formio left the Emperor undefended, on the side of his threatening enemy. His influence in Italy was lost; his hereditary dominions dismembered, his armies vanquished, and his power impaired. France had no Continental enemy remaining capable of opposing her. Spain was her vassal; Holland, the Netherlands, the Sardinian states, and the richest countries of Italy, were her own. The second war, which terminated in the peace of Luneville, strength-

ened and confirmed her preponderance. New enemies were repulsed and old ones subdued. The balance of power was overthrown.

While these causes prolonged the war, another, the first and greatest, exasperated it. The destructive spirit of Jacobinism, which England fought to subdue, still raged with increasing fury. It had become the fixed and permanent principle that swayed the counsels of France, and had spread with frightful rapidity through the surrounding states. Affording encouragement, and promising high advantages to the rebellious of all countries, it became the general signal for revolution against established governments. The fatal system of pretended confraternity with the oppressed ensured success, wherever discontent and ambition united to produce crime. With so powerful a support as the open approbation and assistance of France, the most contemptible handful of political fanatics or desperadoes were capable of shaking the oldest and strongest governments in Europe. As the contagion was general, state after state fell into the vortex of French influence, Jacobinism became more formidable, and the incentive to war grew stronger.

When, at length, the Hydra of revolution was overthrown by the herculean arms of a single military despot, deluging in its fall the country

of its birth with blood, a system succeeded less sanguinary and ferocious in its nature, but equally hostile, to all that it was the interest of England to preserve. None of the original objects of the war had yet been attained. Still threatened with destruction, no sacrifice was too great to avert it. With rebellion and discontent in her bosom, oppressed with unexampled burthens, she yet persevered, often single handed, against an enemy, whose power was only equalled by his ambition. The impossibility of a permanent peace was further proved by the events attending the temporary pause for breath, obtained at Amiens. While the bold and fortunate Napoleon, living only upon war and conquest, was possessed of disproportionate Continental preponderance, England was of necessity his active constant opponent. Distresses and difficulties were multiplying around her; but the martial energy of the government, and the ardent zeal of the people, were undiminished. Parliament, though still containing a party adverse to a belligerent policy, beheld the Minister, like another Demosthenes, exhorting his assembled countrymen to oppose the gigantic ambition of another Philip. The extending tyranny of the French ruler, and the wasting power of his few antagonists, incessantly demanded new efforts, and strengthened the necessity of resistance. Of

this, a proof of a different and perhaps more convincing nature was afforded. The statesmen who had long asserted the impolicy and inefficiency of the war, were suddenly called in a united body to the cabinet. Their conduct, though invigorated by the support of Parliament and the people, though directed by the bold and powerful genius of their great leader, only demonstrated more fully and universally, that France, under a military chief, with his armed bands encircling her immense territory, was the irreconcilable foe of England. The ardent sincerity of a negotiator, accredited by an administration, known to be intent on peace, and amicably disposed towards imperial France, was met by duplicity, and was finally fruitless. The nation was convinced that it was easier to declaim against the war with eloquence in the Senate, than to terminate it by the deliberate wisdom of the cabinet. The boasts and promises of a dozen years were seen to end in a vain attempt to procure peace with security, and a series of unsuccessful efforts to carry on the war with dignity and credit.

If it could have been deemed a safe, an honorable, or a beneficial policy for Great Britain to divide the empire of the civilized world with France, both co-operating to their mutual advantage, and holding between them all other countries in subservience to their views, there was

at this time no obstacle to the establishment of such a compact. France, on being left untroubled mistress of the Continent, would have yielded to her adversary the dominion of the seas ; the possession of conquered colonies, and all possible facilities for European commerce. But if the iniquity and insecurity of such a scheme could have been disregarded, the Ruler of the French was not of a character to which the interests of a rival might be trusted ; nor could that system be permanent, which depended on the life of a single tyrant, or the delirium of a single people. It was only from the restoration of a political balance which should hold every state equally independent, that lasting amity and repose could be hoped for. While, therefore, the victorious Napoleon was marching with his legions from capital to capital, over vanquished nations, to which his arbitrary voice gave laws ; enriching his empire by universal plunder ; enlarging its boundaries at his pleasure ; and maintaining and strengthening in its centre, a stupendous military power, already deemed invincible and irresistible ; terms like those never could be obtained. It was evident that the crowns which, from his own over-charged head, he had showered down upon his family and followers, being usurpations upon the rights of others, could only be preserved as long as, by an overwhelming force, he could disconcert

every attempt to assert the claims of justice. While, therefore, his power was not superior to that of all other states combined, his empire was insecure. On this consideration, his policy was undeviatingly adverse to the restitution of any single acre of territory, that had been once annexed to France. When the period of his downfall approached, even when surrounded almost under the walls of Paris by victorious armies, this master-principle swayed his conduct; and the negotiations at Chatillon were ineffectual, because he refused to resign possession of nations foreign to France, but which gave him the command of Europe.

Happily for the kings and people of all countries, the persevering energy of Great Britain and her Allies at length effected the subversion of this insatiable military tyranny. Europe, convulsed and dismembered by the agitations, and exhausted by the perpetual struggles of nearly five and twenty years, was to be restored by its liberators to peace and order. To answer the ends of justice, a war of rapine must be followed by a peace of indemnity; a war of danger from the strong, by a peace of security to the weak. The integrity of France being preserved with equal generosity and good policy by her conquerors, those powers who had suffered most severely by her aggressions could not look to her for compensation or redress. How then

were they to be indemnified but by the acquisition of those minor states which had formerly been the useful and willing instruments of the grand enemy in his ambitious attempts, and which would still, if left independent, be at the mercy of the first strong hand that should seize them. The old balance of power had been destroyed, and as in the establishment of a new one, the sacrifice of particular interests was inevitable, the blame, if any be incurred, must fall on those who caused, not on those who obeyed, so unfortunate a necessity. The policy of the Allied powers was the wisest and most equitable that, amidst such complicated difficulties, could have been devised. Those nations which had constantly opposed the encroachments of Buonaparte, required to be fortified against the future, and had just claims to remuneration for the past. It may be urged that no political necessity is strong enough to justify the seizure and appropriation of a free state. But here the states that were seized had helped to create the necessity for their alienation. Sardinia had resisted the general invader to the last extremity, and had suffered deeply in the contest. Genoa had spontaneously received the conqueror with open arms, and contributed to the infliction of further wrongs upon the still surviving independence of Europe. That state, therefore, could not reasonably complain of

being snatched from the sway of an usurper, and placed under the dominion of a lawful Monarch whom it had helped to dethrone. Switzerland which had not yielded till left, after an honorable struggle, incapable of further opposition to the arms of France, though a tempting prize in the midst of claimants for territorial indemnity, was restored untouched to its former independence. The same principle of just restitution was followed in support of legitimacy, which has become a standing term of reproach to England and her Allies. But if this principle is only shewn in restoring oppressed and suffering nations to the Rulers whom their former Constitutions, now subverted by a tyrannical usurper, had acknowledged as their lawful Sovereigns; in giving back to those Rulers the Kingdoms which had been torn from their hands in criminal contempt of right, it is a principle which any Statesman may be proud to support. If the Monarchs thus restored, forgetful of past adversity, abuse the power with which they are re-invested; it is at least better for a nation to be aggrieved by a domestic, than by a foreign tyrant; to have to contend according to their laws with an excessive power which those laws had originally created, than with the unshackled despotism of a strange oppressor, who by his single voice destroyed all previously existing obligations; and free from

all ties himself, prescribes the rules which his victims have only to obey. *Hæc si gravia aut acerba videantur, illa gravius æstimari debere.*

There is at this day no man of any party who can contemplate Europe in its present relations with Great Britain, and affirm sincerely, that such a state of things could have been accomplished under any Government that has existed in France since the fall of Louis the Sixteenth. The ambition and power of our ancient rivals are humbled ; and whenever the time may come, as come it will, though Heaven long avert it, when new wars break out in Europe, we can assume our ancient station of controul and influence, and rely on the efficiency of our interposition. This would have been impossible while a Government essentially military flourished in the centre of Europe, even if for a time it could have been restrained by the force of arms or of treaties, within the limits necessary to the safety of other powers. To a proud and licentious soldiery peace must always be odious, and the armies of France, under their late enterprising leader, though his sway was absolute, and his influence paramount, could not have remained long in a state of repose. The great body of the people was rapidly changing into one enormous army, which, had it been once arrayed, not all the combined nations of the Christian world could have subdued. But the charm of their invincibility is now broken, and

the powers that have gained the ascendancy are disposed, by the strongest motives that can influence the conduct of Governments, to lasting peace.

Turning from the unparalleled success of a policy which has triumphed over the formidable enemies, the crafty intrigues, the dangerous spirits, and all the *horrentia martis* which had so long perplexed our counsels, a sad and gloomy prospect succeeds to the bright scenes of victory and glory. The warm summer of prosperity was followed by the winter of discontent. Severe distresses and difficulties spread throughout the country, falling most heavily on the labouring classes, of whom great numbers were reduced from a state of profitable industry to become objects of parochial charity. At this unhappy period began the stratagems and machinations to corrupt the morals and inflame the passions of the multitude, for purposes subversive of the British Constitution, and destructive to the peace and welfare of society. Whether the atrocious design which has called forth a power stronger and more terrible than the law, to counteract it, originated in men who, seizing an occasion which they deemed auspicious, hoped to elevate their fortunes at the expense of their country's quiet, or whether it was a poisonous exhalation from the last noxious weeds that withered in the blasted soil

of Jacobinism, it is impossible to tell. But the old cry, which in the delirium of 1793, and at the crisis of ten years before, had alarmed the good and stirred up the bad among the people; still served as the signal and the mask of revolution. Reform, the diapason of the seditious, *vox extramodum absona*, was the object professed by the leaders in the plot; and the men who proposed to repair the British Constitution by a radical change in the construction of its main-pillar, the House of Commons, a work requiring the wisdom of the wisest, and the practical knowledge of the most experienced, began their labours by an appeal to the most ignorant and unpractised of the whole community.

It is impossible to imagine a combination of diabolical contrivances more fitted to effect the destruction of a Government, and fill a happy kingdom with the crimes and miseries of a civil war, than the means lately adopted to unite against existing institutions, the vast physical powers of the most numerous portion of the population. In times of general trouble, the lower orders being rendered impatient and irritable by continued sufferings, they were told in various parts of the country, by persons who seemed animated with the ardour of truth and charity, who spoke in terms suited to their uncultivated minds, that the evils under which

they laboured were imposed on them by their Rulers; who were themselves revelling in luxury, and who were gifted with power thus to oppress them; by a corrupted Constitution, which these their philanthropic instructors would with their assistance reform. It was not for multitudes of labourers and artisans to detect the hypocrisy of these insidious attempts to mislead them. Their morality, engendered by religious habits, was undermined and attacked by impious publications, which tended to destroy the only obligation beyond the fear of immediate legal punishment, that bound them to the performance of their duties, and restrained them from the commission of crimes. These arguments moving the strongest passions of human nature, poured from many quarters, and in many ways, upon the large masses of population inhabiting the different manufacturing and labouring districts of the kingdom. To uninstructed minds, incapable of deliberation, such impressions were subtle, deadly poisons. They taught one part of the people that they had strength to overcome the rest; that it was their duty and their interest to do so; and that there was no Divine Providence to punish them if they should do wrong. This morbid feeling once implanted in the heart, being strengthened by the hope of future benefit, and inflamed by the violence of present distress, no counter-reasoning could

avail. Allured by promises of ease and profit, what voice from behind could call them back to patient endurance and continued poverty? The alternative was painful but necessary. There was no time to show them by experience the fallacy of their views; terror alone could ensure the nation's immediate safety, by forcing them to recede.

At the meeting of parliament, his Majesty's ministers were in possession of documents, that proved beyond dispute the existence of a conspiracy, dangerous, both in its nature and extent: they did prove it to a large majority in Parliament, consisting of men of all parties and opinions. It is as certain, though not so easy to demonstrate, that a correspondent majority of those among the people, who reason on political questions, were impressed with the same conviction. That their judgment was correct, has been shown by subsequent facts. There are, however, some, who still condemn the measures destined to accomplish our deliverance.

Among these, there are many who, at first, denied altogether that there was any conspiracy against the government. It was said, that the reformers of Spa-fields were only rioters, turbulent indeed, but not disloyal; that the conspirators at Nottingham and Derby were Luddites, or their impotent remains; and that the tumultuous petitioners of Manchester, were

starving wretches, seeking an improvement of their condition by a lawful and reasonable application; treason and revolution, were words derided by these fearless patrons of conspiracy. But now that a train of evidence, alas! fatally conclusive, has been wound about the victims of delusion, and the whole plot lies bare and open before the nation that was to be its sacrifice; they now do deign to acknowledge, that there was a conspiracy; a treasonable intention to effect a treasonable purpose, and that designs were formed, and measures adopted to ensure its success. Being thus driven from their strong hold of obstinate incredulity, they now employ their honest efforts; to show that no danger was to be apprehended, to depreciate and ridicule their talents and their means; their resources and their contrivances; to contrast the mighty strength of the government, with the contemptible weakness of the power by which it was to be overthrown; and lastly, strange and incongruous absurdity! to shew that the most guilty acts of the traitors were occasioned by the treacherous machinations of ministerial agents, who were employed to create an opportunity for augmenting the power of the crown, and abridging the liberties of the people.

It is at this time unnecessary to show, what were the ultimate objects of the guilty persons, who incited the people to rebellion in different

parts of the country. The evidence on the trial of Watson and his gang, and the later disclosures against the Derby insurgents, have left the treasonable intent unquestionable. But it was not the single attempts of a few desperate individuals, that would have excited the alarm of the government. At the period when parliament was first called on for a decision upon the reports of the Secret Committees, it was not only apparent to every eye that great numbers of the lower orders were corrupted into a disposition to rise upon the first promising opportunity, but facts were disclosed, which proved that the conspiracy had already advanced to a dangerous height, and was then hastening towards complete revolution. Attempts have been made to ridicule and call in question the reports of the Committees; but no one has yet detected one error, mis-statement, or inconsistency, in any one of those important documents. It is true that the effects, which are therein considered likely to result from the conspiracy, have been averted or alleviated by the measures of government; but this success would have been unattainable, if those measures had been delayed. The infinite variety of arguments adduced by the party condemning the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, have only succeeded in proving the incompatibility, between the ultimate intentions of the conspi-

rators, and the means of fulfilling them which were in their possession, before the interposition of government. But, *parva sæpé scintilla contempta magnum excitavit incendium*. Is this happy expedient to be blamed and vilified for its timeliness—because it was not too late to disconcert, without incalculable bloodshed, the projects of the nation's enemies? Would it have been better, if they had waited till the traitors were actually in a formidable body, armed, and provided with the means to make a stand against all the King's troops that could on an emergency be sent against them? Perhaps it will be doubted, that such an union of distant, and in a military view, unconnected bodies could have taken place. But who can venture to prescribe bounds to the effect that the smallest success would have had on the minds of the multitudes, dispersed in all parts of the kingdom, who were prepared, by the inflammatory speeches and writings with which their principles had been assailed, for insurrection, under the first bold leader who should present himself? It was said, by more than one member of the nefarious association, that precipitancy had ruined all; that the explosion had taken place too soon, and that a little more patience and caution would have led to the most perfect triumph. And are there any circumstances to contradict these assertions? On the contrary, they are confirmed by every subsequent act of the evil-disposed

all over the country. Notwithstanding the terror that may be supposed to have been spread among the disaffected, by the resolute efforts of government, after the first report ; the combinations and tumults, the snares and open attempts of the desperate, and the ready accession of the needy and unguarded to their plans, continued unabated.

To dwell on the volumes of evidence supplied by the various committee reports, and by the events which every man has seen passing before his eyes, shewing the extent of the plots, and the many treasonable proceedings of the persons concerned in them, would be an irksome and an useless task. At this moment, the question between ministers and the country, respecting what has been termed a suspension of our liberties, is not the existence of danger—that is settled beyond contradiction, but whether the danger, such as it was, required the means that have been employed to obviate it, and whether the means were applicable.

Experience has proved in this country, since the passing of the Habeas Corpus Act, that its suspension has been a necessary, and highly useful weapon, to arm the crown against treason ; this much, no one doubts : but the amount and extent of the treason, which justifies such an expedient, is matter for discussion. There have been cases in which it has been resorted

to, without one dissentient opinion. There have also been treasons, when it has been thought altogether unnecessary. To find the medium between these two extremes, is a point of some importance to the present question : but which ever way impartial reason may decide, some difficulties will yet remain in the minds of those who in times of danger would preserve the name and form of freedom at the sacrifice of immediate security, and at the risk of freedom itself.

If treason can be proved to have existed in the mind of but one man, and it appears that the minds of many men are in a state susceptible of treasonable impressions, the Government has good cause for alarm. It is only on uncommon occasions, of which but few instances are to be found in the history of the world, that treason begins by the simultaneous and sudden rising of a great and powerful body. The precautionary efforts of Government must therefore be directed against the appearance of rebellion wherever it might by any probable success increase to general revolution. A probability of this nature was to an imminent degree apparent after the meeting at Spa-fields. The highly treasonable matter contained in the speeches made to the vast numbers assembled there, is sufficient to denote that only physical force was wanting to produce a general revolt against

the Government. The attempt, however it may have been happily ineffectual to corrupt the soldiery, was nevertheless actually made, and indicated the atrocity of the designs that had been formed. It is not meant to impeach the general and tried loyalty of those brave men to say, that had they not been preserved by the certainty and unchanging nature of their little stipends, from the distress that visited all other classes, many would probably have fallen into the snare that was laid for them. The conduct of the conspirators on this point affords an instance, among many others, of their extraordinary adherence to the plans pursued by the French Revolutionists. Having, however, failed in this important part of their design, they endeavoured to make amends by seizing all the fire-arms and other warlike weapons within their reach, with which they might hope to subdue those whom they had failed to seduce. Their eagerness to obtain these advantages was one of the causes which led to the discovery of their intentions. But in other respects it was no premature development.

The first grand step of a faction that meditates the overthrow of a Government, is the formation of a society of which all the leaders are members; where all measures to promote the general end originate, and are discussed; which serves as a medium of communication

between all the most extended and distant branches of a conspiracy, and is, in short, the axis of a world of treason. Accordingly, a society with appropriate functions was established, upon principles subversive of the Constitution, and with a name borrowed, like most of the symbols, terms, and technical proceedings of the conspiracy, from the vocabulary of the French Revolution. Whoever considers the nature of such a combination in the heart of a populous kingdom, where liberty of speech and action is almost unbounded, will watch with jealousy and alarm every step of their progress. The faction of the Jacobins, the principal instrument in the destruction of the French Monarchy, and of which the very name has in latter times become terrible to the ear of loyalty, originated in an obscure society of forty individuals, possessing, besides the hidden spirit of treason and ambition, no other power or privilege than the liberty of free discussion. Amidst the tumultuous distractions of the early part of the French Revolution, this seminary of rebellion was scarcely noticed; but when it had acquired strength, consequence, and consistency, its bold inroads upon law and order, became too impetuous for royal power to restrain. Let, then, the advocates of meetings for indefinite objects, beware how they suffer one seed of revolution to be planted in the soil of popular opinion, lest,

like some plants invisible till they have taken deep root, they spring up too strong to be eradicated without destroying the land of their birth.

The intermediate gradations between a society formed for purposes that are indefinite, though designated by some title within the bounds of law, and a constituted body professing principles in opposition to the established Government, and claiming to be recognized as a distinct power, are neither so great nor so difficult of attainment as to promise security to any nation enjoying freedom. And when in times of danger and suspicion, such combinations abound, and consist of persons hostile to the Constitution, no addition of strength that is compatible with the safety of loyal subjects, can be too great for the Government to be trusted with. "Factions," says Voltaire, "are generally established on pretence of reformation;" and here reform was the ostensible object of a score of factions, who made it a torch to light the unwary upon the paths of iniquity, which they had marked out for themselves. The extent of the danger which threatened the country was therefore incalculable; and was, moreover, of a different nature from any that had ever called forth the energies of Government. It existed in a particular order of society that had never before disturbed the public tranquillity but in

partial riots. Even on these occasions, they were always terrible, but, when combined against established law, they were more to be dreaded than any other hostile body, both on account of their immense numerical strength, and the variety of stimulants which may be brought to operate on them with peculiar violence. A recurrence to the civil tumults of other times, afforded no parallel by which experience, useful in the present emergency, could be acquired. That the Suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, under such circumstances, was without a precedent, can be no argument against its present necessity; for no such circumstance had ever before existed to bring on the question of its expediency.

Can it be deemed indispensable, in order to justify a temporary augmentation of the executive power, that a rebellious party should be up in arms, occupying some strong position, and prepared to resist the king's armies? Supposing the conspiracy had extended only to a design against the crown, was it to reach the height of those by which the church and state were endangered in 1715 and 1745, before extraordinary measures were adopted? Surely, it is better to prevent a general rebellion by one resolute act, than to quell it when it has actually come to pass, by a sanguinary conflict. Had any of the former plots against the house

of Brunswick been discovered, when only six or eight men had been become liable to a charge of treason, but when it was known that thousands were ready to rise, at their instigation, whenever the prospect of success should brighten; would it then have been argued, that a strong constitutional government had nothing to fear from a few desperate individuals? Would any among the truly loyal, have hesitated to confide themselves to the minister who should have undertaken to preserve to them their liberties, their religion, and their lawful King?—The difference that has been urged between these two cases is, that, in former times, men of rank and property were concerned, and that at present, none but the lowest orders have been found disaffected. The distinction is indeed momentous; but to which side of the argument will it tend when, passing over the intermediate space between the formation of the design and its open explosion, we consider either party leagued, and well united, in all the power that it inherently possesses, and animated by the sentiments, and attracted by the hopes and desires which would, in either case, operate on their minds? Whether would it be more dreadful to contend against a few unpopular nobleman, at the head of ten or twelve thousand troops, or to have the kingdom half covered with the myriads of artisans, labourers,

and manufacturers of all descriptions, against whose fidelity to their King and to their Maker, the arts of the late conspirators were employed? The crown might be menaced in vain, by a combination of a few of all ranks; but, against a combination of all of one rank, and that one the most numerous, the whole power of the government would be a feeble counterpoise. What is the mutiny of a few petty officers and their men, against the rest of a ship's crew, compared with the general rising of all the seamen, though every officer remained faithful to his captain? Or, would the revolt of a score of generals, and as many regiments, against the Commander-in-Chief of an army, be equal to the rebellion of all the common soldiers, though unsupported by the lowest ensign in the ranks?—England has never known, and God forbid she ever should be made to know, the horrors of a general conflict, between the upper and the lower orders of society. When the probability of that event was strong enough to alarm the boldest among us, there were very few but were insensible to the magnitude of the peril that hung over the nation. It was because the internal divisions which our history records, have only been contests between parties, each comprehending in itself a due proportion of all ranks. By both, the commercial system of the country was un-

injured ; its prosperity unimpeded ; and whichever side finally became victorious, its ordinary state of settled tranquillity was soon restored. But different, fatally different would be a struggle for mastery between the rich and the poor ; with the nobles, gentlemen, and traders on the one side, and the remaining portion of the population on the other. One party having all to lose and nothing to gain ; the other, all to acquire, and nothing, but valueless, forfeited lives to risk. Whatever might be the immediate issue of so awful a contest, Britain, in an age of prosperity, would hardly recover her humbled greatness ; and while the struggle lasted, it is not for man to calculate or imagine the desolation and multiplied misery of her condition. Deprived of commerce through the defalcation of the class that produces the manufactures by which it is chiefly supported, and agriculture left to decay by the revolt of the labouring peasantry, her existence could only be preserved by some means yet hidden in the inscrutable recesses of Providence.

While the foundation for this pile of evil was building before our eyes, the same description of persons who, twenty-five years back, when the Briareus of Jacobinism was thrusting his hundred hands into a hundred different parts of the British Empire, would have had us lay quiet till the giant had trampled on King, Lords

and Commons in his march, were again at hand to deprecate all forcible measures as encroachments on liberty. They would not in times of danger allow the King's Ministers, at once supported and controlled by Parliament, to be the guardians of their freedom. No, they would hold it fast in their own hands—but how long?—as long as the spreading pestilence would let them. They would keep it until the corrupted and ungovernable of the people, changed from useful members of society to reformers, from reformers to insatiable revolutionists, should come in swarms to overwhelm them, and their liberty and their property together.

And can it be doubted that this would have been the consequence of forbearance? Has any one yet ventured to suppose that the evil, flowing in numberless streams through the country, would have stopped of itself—that the disseminators of sedition, who were living by their trade, living too in the hope of final exaltation from its prosperity, would spontaneously have ceased to embitter the land with their potions—that the labourers and mechanics, inflamed by their provocatives, would of their own accord quietly and soberly have turned to the humble duties of their calling? Or was it by the gentle remedy of a proclamation that would have become a new subject of impudent scorn, or by occasional prosecutions under existing laws, hazardous and

tedious in the process, uncertain in the issue ; or by the enforcement of the Riot Act, treating a treasonable insurrection like a local disturbance ; that the diseased minds of an innumerable multitude could have been healed, and the acts of their delirium prevented? Would these ordinary and partial measures have counteracted the baleful influence, strong as it was general, which was perpetually deriving new venom from its polluted spring? Or when did ever disaffection, nourished by discontent, suddenly cease as if in the common course of events, while the inflammatory artifices that caused it were left uncensured and unpunished? The public trial and condemnation of the leaders of the incendiaries would have given but a momentary depression to their successors in the plot, while their object and their means were either under-rated or disregarded. But had the first that were seized (as it appears must have happened) either through a premature apprehension, or the deficiency of conclusive evidence, or any incidental fears among the Jury, abided their trial, and been let loose to rejoin and encourage their followers, with their conspiracy still unchecked by some new power in the executive Government, no human efforts could have delayed the awful crisis of the fate of England, beyond the time necessary for them to spread the news of their acquittal, and call another

general meeting—for which they would have been better prepared than for the last.

When the object of national alarm consists in the opinions of a number of people having an evil tendency ; as opinion is not a substantial body that can be warred against and overturned by strength ; moral efforts must be used, which oppose a countervailing influence of the same nature as itself. The minds of those classes who were to be made the instruments of treason, were distempered with false and pernicious notions which could not be rectified by reasoning, inasmuch as the victims of delusion had not capacity to form just decisions. Against their insidious teachers, the wise and loyal defenders of the Constitution must have been weak and unsuccessful antagonists. It was therefore necessary practically to undeceive them. If the Habeas Corpus Act be a blessing to this country because its very name is a shield before the bosom of liberty, it is also valuable because the temporary cessation of its power strikes a salutary terror into the hearts of such as will trample upon liberty and law together. There is a force in mere words when they refer to something that is venerable, which no actions are capable of acquiring. Of this the late suspension is an instance. That the bulwark of the people against the highest power in the Kingdom should be used even in name by the

people against a power lower than their own, is an event that must have more effect in alarming the seditious than any attack by physical strength. If a number of such unfortunate individuals as were lately arraigned at Derby were assembled on a treasonable purpose, they would be less disconcerted at the capital punishment of a leader, or the embodying of an army to oppose them, than at the suspension of a statute which is known to be sacred but upon extremities of national peril. The first promulgation of such a measure strikes a blow to treason which no other single act can inflict. Thus, where the first object was to produce a strong counteracting effect on a number of distempered minds, and to fill them with dread of the designs they had formed, no expedient could be so applicable or so successful. Considered particularly as a legal measure to answer the exigency of the moment, and without reference to the political effect on the conspiracy, it appears absolutely indispensable. It would have been vain to arrest the leaders of so many bands of insurgents if the ordinary forms of law had been observed, and the periods for trial beyond the power of the crown to alter or protract. It was never denied that treasonable designs had been carried to a great extent ; and that considerable numbers of the people were infected with a spirit of discontent and resist-

ance to established law. It was also impossible to form a precise notion of the amount of the danger as it already existed, or to calculate the time which might elapse before it could be entirely quelled. The events which must occur during this momentous interval, might be of a nature which would render it unsafe to give that general developement of proceedings which is afforded by a public trial, and Government must therefore, to protect the people, have power to dispose at its pleasure of such persons as may have given reasonable grounds of suspicion : without this power it would be fruitless to contend against a mischievous combination so widely extended and so complicated in its plans. The laws being permanent and unchanging, are applicable only to occurrences in their common course ; and there are some extraordinary and emergent cases in which laws that are generally beneficial become injurious, and tend to defeat the purposes for which they were made. The Habeas Corpus Act was passed to benefit and protect the whole body of the people ; but when it is made the safeguard of traitors against detection or punishment, it behoves the Constitutional guardians of the people's rights to fulfil its spirit and intent, though by the temporary violation of the letter. While the loyal and peaceable inhabitants of disturbed districts, and the fathers of families

all over the kingdom, felt themselves in immediate peril from a plot which aimed to destroy the Government that protected them; when they saw that the probabilities of success to the conspirators became every hour more alarming from the unchecked boldness of their advances; they might justly have complained of the imbecility and negligence of their Rulers, if, to preserve the names of liberty and security untouched in the Statute Book, they had suffered the most awful of all national dangers to have burst over their heads, and involve them in irremediable ruin. All law is a sacrifice of a part of a man's natural liberty, in order to preserve and secure the rest. In ordinary times, the ordinary sacrifice is sufficient; but when liberty itself, and the laws which protect it, and property and every thing valuable to society is endangered, that mistrust is foolish and fatal which would hazard all rather than suspend a little.

If, for the prevention of some imaginary evil, England had been called on to surrender for ever the palladium of her liberty, it is impossible that a louder outcry could have been raised against the sacrifice than resounded from a certain quarter when Ministers proposed to suspend the Habeas Corpus Act. The cry was loud, not deep; and the folly of the alarm that was spread, has now become apparent. During the

period that the measure was in operation, the most clamorous of its opposers were unable to detect one evil consequence resulting from it; its supporters may boast that they have contributed to baffle a design which, without their efforts, would by this time have gone near to render all opposition desperate. It is now discovered that the Palladium of our liberty has not deserted us; it only left the Temple to watch the wooden horse which came *fata armis*, pregnant with treachery and ruin, within our walls. It went forth to explore the recesses of treason—*terebrare cavas uteri et tentare latebras*. The evils which hung over the country have been averted, and the measure so reprobated by its opposers, has been mainly instrumental in restoring peace and security? While this great benefit is its visible justification on the one hand, what on the other is the mighty mischief and injury that attended it, to call forth all the censure with which it was loaded. Is there one peaceable and loyal man throughout the kingdom who can say that he was unjustly abridged of his liberty; might not all speak, think, and write as fully and boldly as before; and had not all the strongest opposers of Ministers the same vent for their opinions, the same freedom in expressing them? it was an act solely directed against disloyalty, which none but the disloyal had cause to dread. It has

been said, that every man in England was at the mercy of a Secretary of State. As well and truly, might we at all times be called at the mercy of every police magistrate. When crimes are of a common nature, and extend no further in their effect than to the individuals who commit them, and those who suffer by them, their punishment may be open, and in the customary course of law; but, when they are comprehensive and indefinitely ramified, the investigation of them must be secret and cautious, and less subject to ordinary restraints. In both cases, there must be authentic grounds for suspicion, before personal liberty can be invaded.

It is indeed possible, and deeply is the chance to be lamented, that, in such general and extensive measures of executive justice, some innocent individuals may unhappily be confounded with the numerous guilty. This is a misfortune, sometimes inevitable, but which may generally be avoided by prudence. If, however, in an act of defence and security, notwithstanding the best efforts of human precaution and discrimination in the government, some unfortunate few, who have deserved better, must submit to partial suffering, let the reproach fall, not on the executors of justice, but on those who rendered their interposition necessary. "On the original contrivers of mischief, let an insulted nation pour out its vengeance." If fathers and husbands must be torn

from their houses and families ; if those who have been deceived, must be punished for the crimes of their deceivers, if calamities fall thick on the unprepared and the unwary, it is the instigators, not the avengers of wrong, who are responsible for the event. When the arm of judgment is once raised, it will not fall harmless.

As discontent is mostly the first cause of revolution, mistrust is the strongest stimulant to discontent. When great numbers, in a well-governed kingdom, are suffering under any unusual distress, they naturally turn to the government which they support for relief. If this is not to be immediately obtained, confidence on the part of the people, and active zeal in their rulers, cannot fail to produce patience, until more favourable times. But in the late commotions, a dangerous belief was spread among all classes of men, and was supported by many among the highest, that the house of Commons was corrupt, and that the people of England were unrepresented in parliament. It was therefore a prevalent and fatal conclusion, that the country, in its distress, had no aid or comfort to hope, from the only source which could afford either with effect ; and the loud cry that resounded within the walls of parliament, and was echoed far and near, that England was governed by an usurping aristocracy, served to inflame the general disaffection, and

gave a specious colour to the proceedings of the instigators to sedition. It was, therefore, to say the least of it, unwise to agitate this momentous question at so critical a period. Those, who at once are well-wishers to their country, and sincerely desire a reform in the representation, must not only prove that it is necessary in order to remove an existing evil, but must shew that the times and the public temper will admit of their attempt with safety. Last year was eminently unfavourable to the execution of such projects. Hardly in the heat of the political fever that raged when Mr. Grey brought forward his petition, would the measure have been so dangerous. It should seem that the public mind, having contemplated for now nearly forty years, this great question with all its branches, has sickened at the prospect. Many zealous partisans have fallen off entirely, and embraced their ancient notions of contentment and the safety it affords ; while others, who still support the doctrines, have foregone the most violent of their demands, and have changed their opinions on substantial points. Beside the public declarations to this effect of men high in parliament, the petitions presented last year, in the abundance of mechanical manufacture, are sufficient to show the change that time and experience have wrought. Out of five hundred and twenty-seven petitions

for reform, submitted to the House of Commons last Session, five hundred and fourteen were rejected, their reception being wholly incompatible with the forms and dignity of Parliament. When a majority of the nation, or any large and respectable portion of it sincerely desire the attainment of a favourite object, is this the way in which they make known their requests? The sentiments of the people are to be learnt from petitions; but is it with such as these that they would address the Legislature with hopes of success? Surely the inhabitants of Great Britain are not so lost to sense and memory, as to be ignorant of the way to exercise their just privileges—as to leave the expression of their will to unauthenticated informal documents, inadmissible by the body whose province it is to hear their complaints, and to redress their wrongs. Let such as declare that the voice of the people is heard in these petitions, look back on those which poured upon the Legislature when the Kingdom was divided on the inferior questions of the Corn-bill or the Property-tax.

Before a reform can be reasonably demanded, some existing abuse should be pointed out, which it would be sure to redress; an abuse not merely in terms, but in fact, and in its consequences. It has not been argued that by the present system of representation any individual

is injured, or liable to injury, or that any real demonstrable good to the Kingdom that might be enjoyed, is withheld. It has been said that a corrupt Administration is supported by the present House of Commons, and that they would be removed and replaced by a better, or more effectually checked in evil measures, were the people really represented in the body that controuls them. But this position assumes that which can never be granted:—that the acts of Government would be wiser if they were directed by other men under other influence. As far as the question can be elucidated by a reference to past times, this argument for reform is nugatory ; for at all periods since the division of the state into parties, there has been an opposition to Government of which the strength is a just criterion of public opinion, and it does not appear that when the cry for reform has been loudest, the adverse party has ever been the most numerous.

If the happiness of the people be the end and aim of all Governments, it ought to be proved before a Constitution is suffered to undergo a change which may produce evil, that an improvement in the condition of the great body of the population is reasonably to be expected ; neither ought the prospect of it to consist merely in the harmony and concord of abstract propositions. It should appear unquestionably that if

an extension of rights be granted to any number of individuals, they will derive a real benefit from the concession, and that it will conduce to the general good of the community without bringing evil or injury upon any part of it. In no one system of reform that has been presented to the House of Commons, have these considerations been attended to. It does not appear that such towns as might receive the elective franchise, would be more than nominally bettered in their political condition. They possess at this moment the benefit of all existing laws, and the liberty of petitioning for new ones; and they possess equal advantages of every kind with those who have the right of sending representatives. Perhaps it will be objected that these arguments tend to shew that the whole representative system is unreal or nominal: this however would be far from just. To a certain extent—to that extent in which it is enjoyed at this day, the right of representation is incalculably valuable; it is the safeguard of a nation's liberties; an effectual and never-failing check on the proceedings and designs of Parliament; and a fixed counterpoise to regal power. Beyond this it is in theory hazardous and delusive—in practice, as far as our little experience guides us, subversive of that order and justice on which alone freedom can ever be grafted in security. It must not be forgotten

that the present election laws owe their establishment to the former dangerous and mischievous extent of the right of voting. In very early times it was discovered that the qualifications of electors must be revised and fixed anew, so as to decrease their numbers, or that every election would render the country a scene of alarming tumult, which would endanger the purity of the House by the return of spurious Members. There is no reason to suppose that at the present day, when the population is so much more numerous, and party agitations more violent, that greater tranquillity and decency would be preserved. Judging, too, by the usual proceedings where the right of voting now exists, there can be little hope that venality and corruption would diminish as the elective privileges extended. If it is otherwise, we must suppose that the present body of electors in Great Britain are men of less integrity and independence than those who would be added to their number by the extension of the franchise. It therefore appears, that as the right of voting is within the reach of all individuals who by their rank or property can be personally interested in the affairs of the nation; and as there are already great numbers possessed of that privilege, who only use it for the purpose of pecuniary gain, its extension would but increase that corruption which the reformers pro-

pose to redress. This observation does not, however, apply to large and populous towns, like Birmingham and Manchester, which are unrepresented in Parliament. If a proposal for granting the elective franchise to such as these could be brought separately and unconnected before Parliament, it would probably be met with unanimous assent. It is accident alone that has left these without the civil rights to which their wealth and consequence seem justly to entitle them; and although it would be difficult to point out any actual benefit which they would derive from the acquisition of them, the change would harmonize with the established system. These, however, are isolated exceptions to the general denial of a necessity for reform. It is the independence and not the number of electors which will secure the integrity of a House of Representatives. Many will be induced to vote from motives of local interest; some will always support a certain family; others a particular party; a few will be directed by pure disinterested patriotism; but a great proportion will always yield to bribes of one kind or another. The latter class will increase in a double ratio to all others as electors become more numerous; for the corruption so much complained of rests not with the Constitution, nor with the House of Commons, nor with any of its individual Members. It originates in the

imperfection of human nature ; and the morals of the whole nation must be improved before it can be destroyed. It has been said that where the morality of nature is insufficient to prevent crime, human laws should be brought to its assistance : but in the present case both are united. If the venality which is said to infect the system existed only in the House, the election laws would be strong enough to guard the people against its effects. But where electors and candidates of all degrees and opinions join in the practice of corruption, the laws have done their utmost. If any ask why they are not enforced, they must answer the question themselves. The offence is too general for punishment, and would only be increased by an augmentation of voters. No plan of Parliamentary reform has been directed against this evil ; and the reformers have therefore passed by a view of the question which might have helped them on their way among moderate and well-disposed neutrals. If the present electors of Great Britain, consisting of the most respectable among the middle classes, and the least dependent among the poor, are to be swayed by bribes, or influenced by motives of personal interest, how would it be if the elective franchise were enjoyed by the incalculable numbers who, ignorant alike of their own and of their country's political concerns, have no views

beyond the desire of providing for themselves and their families. May it not be presumed, that they would be at the devotion of whoever would bribe them highest ; or, that having no just notions of men and things, they might be made the effective instruments and promoters of faction. May not any effect be expected, sooner than that, with the unbiassed voice of reason and truth, they should bestow their suffrages on such as might be safely trusted with the diversified interests of a great nation ?

The influence, which the nobility has gradually acquired during the last century, in the House of Commons, though contrary to the letter of our constitution, will probably be found, when its consequences become more palpable, to be a correction of an evil formerly much dreaded though little understood. It will finally confirm the stability of the government, and may be considered as an improvement which has insensibly grown out of an experience of its necessity. While this power was in its infancy, an able and ingenious writer of the last century, commenting on the distant, but anticipated determination of our present form of government, into either an absolute monarchy or a republic, observes, that in the latter case, if the House of Commons, after uniting in itself all the capacities of the state, should, as it probably would, declare itself perpetual, we should suffer all the tyranny

of one faction, subdivided into many. The danger thus dreaded from the tendency of the present government to a democracy, is effectually averted, by the commixture of the Nobility with the Commons ; while, from the state of parties in Parliament, divided into opposite and conflicting interests, the prerogative of the crown is neither augmented nor infringed ; the medium of communication between King and People is strengthened, and their respective interests drawn more closely together. But, notwithstanding the benefit immediately derived from this union of bodies in the state, great stress has been laid by reformers, on an offer made to prove at the bar of the House, that eighty-four individuals could procure a majority in the Commons. They might have said, that three hundred and twenty Commoners could do the same thing. And what is the inference to be drawn from either fact ; simply, that while parliament is composed of a certain number of members, there must necessarily be a majority constituted by some power or other. But as that power is continually changing ; as the same Lords, who procure the return of four members to one Parliament, may not be able to influence the election of two the next, those peers cannot be said, as some have asserted, to engross the whole legislative power. The same observation would apply to a certain number

of counties and towns, as, were they to combine against the rest, they might for one Parliament, and no more, oppress them without restraint. But a general election is a tribunal at which all must appear, and answer for their conduct; and this power of the majority, will stand or fall accordingly as it has been exercised. Its possessors are therefore bound, by a sense of their own interest, the strongest tie that regulates human actions, to labor for the benefit of the people. This is the course that they have invariably pursued, and from which it may be safely said they will never depart, unless forced into contention by the intemperate attacks of enemies to peace and true liberty. However perfect and beautiful in description, may be the state of things promised by reformers, the blessings which we actually enjoy, and the security in our hands, for their long and prosperous continuance, must never be disregarded. An increase of liberty, and a perfect House of Commons, are the benefits we are told a change would produce. The first is an indefinite advantage, perhaps hardly to be desired; or, if really necessary, attainable through the same channel which has conveyed to us that which we already possess; and the assembly, wholly and purely popular, which we are to receive, is but a compound of impossibilities and uncertainties. If there is now a

balance in the constitution, it would then be overthrown ; if there is now a check to the encroachments of a preponderant democracy, they would then be irresistible. The change might lead to revolution, or endanger the present settlement of property ; while the only visible good held out, is the destruction of the existing order of things, which, if not perfect, is, at least, the best this world contains, and is adapted in all its parts to the country in which it has grown and flourished. These are facts not to be controverted by any ingenuity of theoretic reasoning.

The conduct of parliament in its attention to the kingdom's welfare being unimpeachable, its enemies condemn the manner in which it is constituted. But if an assembly, comprehending so much wealth, talent, and integrity, as the House of Commons, were chosen by sets or by decimation from among the people at large, it would be unwise in the nation that prospered under its guidance, to quarrel with the mode of its election. Political institutions must be judged by their practical effect, and not by the manner of their formation. Let the House of Commons be tried by this criterion. If the influence of the Nobles be objected to, let us see whether their interests have been promoted, while those of the people have been neglected. If the power of the crown be

dreaded, let the records of Parliament tell, whether it has been supported or enlarged by any subduction of the people's liberties. It would involve every disputed question of domestic policy, to examine the conduct of the legislature as it affects the inferior classes, who have lately been made to cry the loudest for a reform. If, however, they could reflect on the nature of the boon they ask, they would discover, by the mode in which they are taxed, the point on which the disinterestedness of legislative justice is most conspicuous, abundant cause for satisfaction. They would see, that however humble their condition, the richest and greatest in the realm are ever watchful of their rights and possessions, attentive to their necessities, mindful of their sufferings, and anxious for their happiness. It is remarked by an able writer,* not illiberal in his opinions of human nature, that in a government, where the riches and power are united in the hands of a few persons, "they will readily conspire to lay the whole burthen on the poor, and oppress them still further, to the discouragement of all industry,"——but, how happily different has been the conduct of those to whose direction the constitution has confided the welfare and property of British subjects. Have they spared

* Hume.

themselves, and cast the weight of imposts on the poor? Have they not on the contrary, in providing for the vast expenditure of the government, laid taxes of the highest possible ratio, on all articles of luxury, which can be procured only by the rich ; on the transfer, whether by gift, sale, or demise, of large property, which can be effected only by the rich ; on rents of lands and houses, which, multiplying as they rise in amount, are felt most sensibly by the rich ; and finally, on incomes, which tax, passing entirely over the poor, and but gently visiting the middle classes, fell, while continued by the wisdom of parliament, with undiminished weight on the well-ascertained revenues of the rich and great.

It is not, however, in the conduct of Parliament, that the more prudent advocates for reform have sought for reasons to call for a change in the constitution. It seems, rather, that they object to the persons who compose the legislature. But very few have yet fairly considered the nature of the assembly, which is proposed as a substitute for the House of Commons. To a third estate, purely democratical, the other two branches of the legislature would be an insufficient counterpoise ; and it is probable, that a revolution would quickly follow the first contest between them. The

crown, undefended from popular encroachment, in one of the broadest avenues to the prerogative, would be separated from the nation with which it now acts in concert. There are indeed few evils that a kingdom can experience from a speculative attempt to reform its constitution, that England would be secure from, were a new and uncontrollable political power to be placed in hands unaccustomed to use it. It must ever be remembered, that the legislature, as it is now constituted, is as open to the complaints of the people as it would be under a perfect democracy. Though it might be made subject to the more frequent controul of the people, it could not be more influenced by their opinion. The two great parties, into which parliament has formed itself, upon the usages of the most prosperous century of our constitution, operate as a mutual check upon each other; and being rival candidates for popular approbation, the basis of all lasting power, appeal to the nation at large, as a final and absolute judge, upon every question touching the general welfare. The right of decision thus vested in the great body of the people, has been exercised with effect, ever since the true constitutional privileges of the subject have been defined and confirmed. It has been exercised in the support of Government, through long and exhausting wars; it has been manifest-

ed in the overthrow of administrations, whenever their counsels have become pernicious to their country—it will continue to guard the nation from foreign and domestic danger, as long as its true value and power are known, and its possessors refuse to barter it for the delusive promises of reformers.

